

Emma West Rasmus, *Mac Weekly* (Macalester College)

Vice President of the United States Joseph Biden and much of Minnesota's Democratic Congressional delegation descended upon Macalester on Tuesday to use their political star power in support of the Democratic-Farm-Labor Party gubernatorial ticket.

DFL candidate for governor Mark Dayton and his running mate, candidate for lieutenant governor Yvonne Prettner Solon, shared the stage with Biden in the Leonard Center Tuesday morning as Biden treated the energetic crowd of students and non-Macalester community members to a nearly 45-minute speech praising Dayton/Prettner Solon and reiterating the importance of the upcoming gubernatorial election.

The economy was the central theme of the day, with speakers such as Congresswoman Betty McCollum and Senators Al Franken and Amy Klobuchar praising the Obama Administration's efforts to "prevent a depression," and condemning their Republican colleagues' recently released "Pledge to America."

Biden echoed the comments of what he called "one of the best Congressional Delegations in the United States of America," and was critical of the way previous Republican administrations had handled the issue of job security.

"I'm angry to see what the unfettered policy of the last administration did to the lives of the American people," Biden said. "A job is about more than your paycheck," Biden said. "It's about your dignity and identity. Millions of Americans have been stripped of that dignity."

Geared for college crowd

Despite the focus on economic growth and job creation, the speakers also emphasized their connections to Macalester, and addressed issues pertinent to students such as debt from college loans and health insurance.

"I've been to Mac," said St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman who kicked off the rally. "The students here are pretty smart. Does anyone in this room think college is affordable?" Coleman asked, to a rousing "no" from the student-concentrated audience.

Former Minnesota State Minority Leader and Mac alum Matt Entenza '83, who was running for governor before getting knocked out in the primary, joined Coleman and Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak on stage at the beginning of the program. Entenza spoke of his strong Macalester roots, lauding the school and surrounding neighborhood for its pro-DFL politics, and condemned current Republican governor Tim Pawlenty for his inaction about college tuition hikes.

"This is the center of great progressive thought in Minnesota," Entenza said. "This precinct is the best in the state for the DFL."

In an interview Rybak underscored the importance of this election for young people, and encouraged students to "get off the couch and do what we did two years ago."

"For Mac students this election is critical for tangible issues, like staying on their parent's healthcare till they're 26," Rybak said. "It's this President and Vice President that get it on clean energy and things that are most important for students."

This wasn't the Vice President's first time on Macalester's campus.

"It's good to be back at Macalester," Biden said at the beginning of his speech.

Biden told the crowd that he had come three times at the bequest of Hubert Humphrey, former Vice President under President Lyndon B. Johnson and former Macalester professor. The two men served for several years together in the U.S. Senate.

"He said, 'Joe, can you go? Here's the ticket.'" Biden remembered Humphrey telling him. "You never said no to the boss."

Co-chair of Mac Dems Natalie Pavlatos '12 said she wasn't expecting college students and

issues related to higher education to be such a focus of the rally.

"I was really surprised," Pavlatos said. "I just expected it to be more of a traditional stump."

About 1,100 students and community residents attended the rally, though Head of Safety and Security Terry Gorman said there might have been as many as 1,500. Gorman noted, though, the crowds didn't even come close to the capacity of the building.

"We thought more students would come," Gorman said. "Maybe students are just more interested in their home politics than they are about this governor's race."

Pavlatos felt otherwise. She said the Dayton campaign had contacted her the week before the rally saying that they were shooting for a crowd of 500 people, 100 of which they hoped to be students. Pavlatos and the Mac Dems were asked by the campaign to organize campus publicity and make sure students turned out for the event. Pavlatos said both she and the Dayton campaign "were blown away by the turnout, especially by students."

Before the rally

A line that wrapped around the Snelling Avenue side of the Leonard Center formed several hours before Biden was even slated to take the stage, as students and others eager to hear the Vice President arrived early to the site to get in line.

Jeanne Stewart '14, wanting to ensure that she made it into the rally, got in line by 8:00 a.m.

"It's really important that he [Biden] came out, because it draws national attention," Stewart said. "I hope it raises people's awareness to have big name people on campus, and shows how important this race is."

The logistics and planning of the event required Macalester's Campus Safety and Security to work with a wide variety of police and law enforcement officials, including the Secret Service. Because Biden's presence at the rally was not confirmed until the week before the event, it forced Campus Safety and Security to work on a dramatically condensed timeline.

"Our process was much more accelerated," Gorman said. "Sometimes we know a few weeks in advance, but this time everything was compacted."

Gorman worked closely with the Secret Service, and said he has a working relationship with some of the agents from the last high-profile political presence on campus, Michelle Obama during the 2008 Presidential election.

"I'm with them all the time," said Gorman of his role in assisting the Secret Service. "We become inseparable."

Gorman described many of the preparations for hosting a major political figure as "meticulous," and said there were lots of logistical issues that had to be dealt with to accommodate the Vice President. The Secret Service temporarily shut down the Snelling Avenue construction project, blocked off side streets and displaced some Mac students and employees by using parking lots around the Leonard Center for the private use of SWAT teams and police. Gorman said they also installed an encrypted phone line at the Leonard Center several days before Biden's arrival.

"They have to ensure the Vice President has instant communications to anywhere in the world, should anything happen to the President," Gorman said. "He's the number two guy."